

ST. NICHOLAS'S CHURCH, NEWCASTLE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE BUILDER.

SIR,—Not having seen any answer to Mr. George Walbeim's letter, dated May 1st, in the subsequent numbers of your "magazine," respecting the date of the erection, &c. of St. Nicholas's Church, Newcastle, I beg leave, for the sake of rendering information, to forward to you the accompanying extract from "Britton's History of Architecture," concerning it:—

"The church is supposed to have been erected in 1389, and the steeple added in the reign of Henry VI., but its history, says Mr. Hodgson, is very obscure. Brand, in 'History of Newcastle,' i. 263, ascribes it to Robert Rhodes, whose name appears on the ceiling of the bell y."

Would it not be as well for your correspondents, when passing their approbation or censure upon any building or edifice, to give their remarks a little more in detail; and for the edification of those who may not be quite so proficient as themselves, point out where the beauties or blemishes (as the case may be) are to be found?

As to say (for instance) "that unhappily the spire of the little church of St. Dunstan's, London, is an entire failure," even though softened down by the words "as compared with the church of St. Nicholas," is rather too sweeping and condemnatory without some further explanation; and I for one should be glad to know in what its failure consists.

Should therefore Mr. George Walbeim have this brought home to him, he will through your magazine reply, for surely "one good turn deserves another." I am, dear Sir, yours truly,

I. B.

THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF IRISH ARCHITECTS.

We have received from Dublin another anonymous letter on this subject, taking up the defence of the Institute. The writer is very indignant at the attack, "wanton as it is unjust," he says, which appeared in the eleventh number of *THE BUILDER*; and stigmatises the conduct of the writer of that letter, in his "presuming to criticise a science which requires a well-studied mind, a vivid imagination, and a sublimity of thought to appreciate, but still more to follow." We do not, exactly, see the logic of this, considering how just a sentence immediately follows on these words:

"But this, Sir, is not the grossest blunder he represents for 'our knight'—a builder's clerk, by the way of adding degradation to contumely, without ever recollecting that he was himself taking the man he meant to abuse, for as a member of the profession, ranking high as he does, it shows his talents and application in the stronger light. Your correspondent perhaps thinks that an architect should be born with a pencil in one hand, and a Corinthian column in the other."

Our correspondent goes on to say, that the Royal Institute of Irish Architects, in endeavouring to assimilate their proceedings to their sister society, could not have a better architecture, and in forming themselves into that Institute, could have no better reason than the respect the members of the profession had suffered for years. Fraternity still prevails amongst its members, and they still meet as often as their business requires it.

The conclusion of the letter is too unbecomingly that personality and anonymity, which we had to complain of in the former letter; and we must therefore make a resolution once for all, which we now set upon, to exclude such matter from our pages. In doing this we but show our respect for our correspondents, in throwing a shield between them and their self-antagonism—for no man finds a greater enemy than his own passions.

HISTORY OF LABOUR IN BUILDING CRAFTS.

(Continued from No. 265.)

The history of Freemasonry has yet to be collated from among the widely-scattered sources where its continuous existence is recorded, and an able exposition of such a work would imply the labour bestowed upon it. Recently, the title of "Freemasons of the Church," has been assumed by a society instituted for the cultivation and promotion of the principles of ancient architecture, which primaries, by the scale of its establishment, and the ability of its officers to effect something like a revival of a fraternity that may be said to have expired with its last practical Grand Master, Sir Christopher Wren. In speaking of that eminent man, it is, however, necessary to say in ex-

planation, that although there was about his mastery the lustre of professional appropriateness, yet the society of FREEMASON-BUILDERS had long before lost its integral value, having merged into that which under the same title has acquired recognition and celebrity throughout the civilized world, by the adoption and practice of universal charity and brotherly love. I must entertain an opinion that the older fraternity met the fate of its extinction in the suppression in England of the ancient religion. That the Church had always promoted architectural science, is evident in the magnificence of her temples and colleges still remaining, and in the ruins of religious houses, which survived the order for razing them only by a massiveness that precluded its accomplishment. Many churchmen were themselves associate Freemasons, and there are still extant several edicts especially for the encouragement and protection of that body; but leaving for the present those imposing structures to tell their own tale of the proficiency of the hands that reared them, and of the piety that originated and supported them, I revert to the more immediate information these papers are intended to convey. The reigns of the princes of the Norman line, and of the first Plantagenet, may truly be termed those of unmitigated oppression; the absolutism of royalty over the nobility was re-enacted with threefold severity upon the people, still the effect of freedom from vassalage enjoyed by the few, was already becoming evident in a rapid and flourishing growth of this class in maritime towns, and in localities where foreigners carried on the limited mercantile operations of the period, for Englishmen had not then arrived at either the right understanding, or pecuniary ability to engage in these transactions. The bowyer,* and the smith, or armourer, were then the topping artificers; next in importance were the ship-builders of the Cinque Ports; then followed the native weavers of coarse woollens, and tanners of leather, and lastly the group of handicraft trades, the majority of whom were employed in building, or work connected therewith.

With the Romans came the elements of constructive science, and though the development of its principles was retarded or suspended by the abandonment of Britain by that people, the introduction of the Saxon power, and the subsequent struggles between the latter and the Norman conqueror, it had never become extinct. The extension and perfection of handicraft trades was naturally dependent upon general prosperity and the increase of disposable wealth, but to which the despotic and turbulent times we have alluded to were a bar; and there is good ground for a conclusion that the condition and remuneration of the ordinary workman was precarious and unsettled until, about the accession of Edward I., in 1272. We gather much curious as well as authentic information from a roll of appeals, preserved in the Tower, of the ninth and tenth years of the reign of that king (i.e. 1271 and 2). He was then assembling a fleet and army at Ruddlan Castle, Wales, for the purpose of attacking the Welsh prince of that country, the stronghold, so called, requiring repair, a considerable body of workmen appear to have been assembled for the purpose, and this record is the earliest upon an extensive scale I am acquainted with, affording unequivocal evidence as to a fixed or current rate of wages; it possesses also further interest, by enabling us to judge of the comparative value of labour, or service, as between soldiers, sailors, and mechanics. The entries in this roll are very numerous, but I select such only as bear upon my subject.

On Friday next, after the feast of the Assumption of the blessed Mary, at Rothelan, paid Master Richard Lenchingham, receiving 12d. by the day for his wages, and the wages of three overseers of twenty, each receiving 6d. by the day, and sixty-three carpenters, each receiving by the day, 4d., going to Anglesey for sixteen days, viz. from Sunday the 23rd of August, to the 7th day of September, each day being reckoned—18s. 16s. 0d.

Sunday next, after the Feast of the Assumption of the blessed Mary, paid one master mason, receiving 6d. per diem, and five masons, receiving each 4d., and one workman, receiving 3d. by the day, for their wages from the said Sunday to the Saturday next before the Feast of St. Matthew the Apostle, for twenty-eight days—3s. 7s. 8d.

Sunday 24th day of October at Rothelan, to David de Waltham, receiving 4d. per diem, and to one plasterer, receiving 4d. per diem, and nineteen workmen, each receiving 2d. per diem for their wages from Sunday, on the Feast of St. Luke, to the next day before the feast of St. Martin, for twenty-three days—5s. 6s. 4d.

Saturday, on the Feast of St. Ambrose, paid to William the plumber, receiving 12d. per diem for his wages from Sunday the feast of St. Benedict, to Sunday the 18th of April, for 29 days—1l. 9s. 0d.

Thursday, 27th August, paid to Robert Giffard,

for the wages of eight constables of cavalry, each receiving 12d., and of 857 archers, each receiving by the day 2d., and of their forty-three captains of twenties each, receiving 4d. per diem, from Tuesday the 25th day of August, for the seven following days—55l. 6s. 0d.

Friday next, after the Feast of the Assumption of the blessed Mary, at Rothelan, paid to forty-seven sailors of the king, conducting the king's ships to Anglesey, for their wages from Sunday the 23rd day of August, for seven days, each receiving 3d., excepting seven, each of whom received per diem 6d.—4l. 14s. 6d.

Tuesday, the Feast of Saint Michael, paid to 120 carpenters, and one overseer of twenty, and the constable, overseers of twenties, smiths and others being accounted for, for their wages from Sunday 28th September, to the 3rd day of October, each day being reckoned by the hands of Master P. de Brampton, 15l. 5s. 0d."

The last entry makes no distinction of the rate paid to each class, but I have transcribed it from the circumstance of smiths being mentioned, which shows that trade to have been current, and that they were necessary to the repairs going on at Ruddlan. It is very probable that this large body of workmen were brought together by impressment, as we find to have been the case a century later, at the rebuilding of Windsor Castle under William of Wykeham. Forced labour for the king's service was the longest continued feature of arbitrary power in England, and co-existent with it was the forced supply of provisions for the consumption of the royal household, the latter imposition not having been entirely abrogated until the coming in of the Stuarts.

From the minuteness of other entries in the roll quoted, there is reason to suppose that the rates of wages specified were the entire equivalent for labour and services performed, there being no entries for provisions supplied to the workmen or soldiery; it affords therefore a standard by which we may estimate the condition 360 years since of the labouring classes, but to render this starting point of my inquiry intelligible, the comparative value of money, the mode of living, and other incidents bearing upon the subject must be taken into account; previous to entering upon this section, I will, however, give another extract from a parliamentary roll, under date a.n. 1301, thirtieth year Edward I. This ancient document relates to a subsidy granted by Parliament of one-seventh of the goods and chattels of the laity to the king for the purpose of prosecuting war against France. Here also occurs an enumeration of the usual handicraft trades, and the officers of the crown appear to have executed their warrants for the levy with the most scrupulous exactness, no personal property whatever being exempted, even the tools of workmen were subjected to inspection and valuation, and they were called upon to satisfy the imposition in money or to suffer a sale. A single transcript will show both the vigilance of the tax-gatherer of 1301, and the description, and estimate of a carpenter's tools at that period:—

A broad axe.....	s. d.
Another.....	0 5
An adze.....	0 3
A square (square).....	8 2
A nagor.....	6 1
Total.....	1 0.

What the tool called a "nagor" may have been I cannot pretend to explain, having heard no satisfactory rendering of the term. In the same roll the tools of blacksmiths are variously estimated at from two to five shillings; and other trades in proportion.

If we calmly consider the circumstances of the trader at this remote period, we shall find notwithstanding that oppression was slow in relaxing its grip, and the strong hand ever ready to menace and to strike, yet the very necessities of the nobles, and the large number of retainers attached to them, rendered the whole in a measure dependent upon the working classes, the latter were but as a fraction compared with the military array of a nation constantly engaged in internal or external warfare, an array which in its lofty bearing scorned association with the followers of peaceful occupations; but in this marked separation of interests lay the future strength of the trading community; the equipment of the kingly and baronial forces, the requirements in building and repairs, and increasing demands for domestic and personal convenience in dwellings and attire, induced employment and a fixity of wages, which the aristocracy could not evade. Thus the minority grew up to importance, and included in their acquisitions glimmerings of the educational knowledge essential to science and trade, while the higher classes were yet steeped in ignorance, and intent only upon the maintenance of the feudal system, to which they clung with an insane hope of perpetuating that hateful tyranny.

Resuming a consideration of the roll of expenses

* Maker of the ancient English long and cross bows, as we find in 1301.